

## 5. COMMUNITY DESIGN

### INTRODUCTION

The Community Design Element addresses the character of the built environment of the Midtown Area, setting forth policies that address new development as well as the improvement of public spaces and streetscapes. A more detailed set of standards and guidelines which address the specifics of new development, such as the orientation and massing of buildings, facades and entries, roofs, and parking configuration and treatment have been developed for the Midtown Area and are included in Section 8.0.

### COMMUNITY DESIGN CONCEPT

The Midtown Area is generally characterized by a lack of visual cohesiveness, a predominance of paved surfaces with sparse landscaping, and a pattern of development which is generally oriented to parking areas and is generally not hospitable to pedestrians. At the same time, Midtown is an interesting part of Milpitas that can be enhanced through high-quality development that is oriented to the pedestrian and the emerging transit function of the area.

The intent of the Community Design Element is to help guide reinvestment in the central portion of Milpitas to create an attractive, high-quality, built environment. The Specific Plan envisions new development and parking areas in Midtown configured to reinforce the City's "public

realm" of sidewalks, streets, parks, and public places. New development is tied together through a system of "green" streets and boulevards, trails and open spaces. New development will be punctuated by urban open spaces and linked into the larger pedestrian and bicycle system. Gateway areas will receive special attention in terms of both architecture and landscape standards. Landmarks, such as the Milpitas Senior Center, as well as public art will be woven into the fabric of the community to create interest and cultural expression.

### COMMUNITY DESIGN GOALS

#### **Goal 1: Create an attractive district that is uniquely Milpitas.**

The Midtown Area represents a tremendous opportunity to create an area that is uniquely Milpitas. Milpitas currently lacks a central community gathering place where residents and visitors can stroll and linger in an attractive setting; a place where community festivals can be staged; or a place that is identifiable as the "heart" of the community. Midtown is the logical location for a community focus, due to its central location and historical association as the origin and center of Milpitas.

In addition, the Midtown Area is highly visible; that is, many pass through the area en-route to other destinations, and the area includes several important community gateways. High-quality development, improved streetscapes and a more diverse mix of land uses in the Midtown Area will greatly improve the image and livability of Milpitas as a whole.



*Midtown contains many interesting features from the past that can contribute to the visual identity and interest of the area, such as the Milpitas Senior Center (above).*

The Midtown Area contains several landmarks that begin to contribute to a unique identity. These include Campbell's Corners, St. John's Church, the DeVries Home, the Senior Center, the Winsor Blacksmith Shop, older homes in the vicinity of Sinott Lane and the O'Toole Elms. The Specific Plan maintains the architectural and landscape elements that contribute to the identity and sense of history while introducing new structures and activities that can provide a visually interesting mix of old and new in the Midtown Area.

**Goal 2: Establish a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use district that is centered on Main Street.**

New development along the Main and Abel Streets corridor and near the transit stations should be designed to be accessible and attractive to pedestrians. While Main Street (between Weller Street and Curtis Avenue) is developed at

an appropriate scale, most of the development along the street has been oriented to the automobile and at the expense of the pedestrian. Sidewalks are interrupted by driveways; parking lots adjoin the sidewalk; and amenities such as landscaping, benches and open space are sparse. In addition, streets near the future transit stations are very wide, lack landscaping and generally create barriers for pedestrians. The Specific Plan promotes development and streetscape improvements that will enhance the pedestrian environment and connections throughout the Midtown Area.

**Goal 3: Provide urban open spaces (i.e., plazas, squares) that serve multiple purposes and can be used for special events.**

With a greater intensity of development and a diversity of uses, urban open spaces and "green linkages" (i.e., green streets and pedestrian/bi-



*The DeVries Home on North Main Street is an attractive building in the Midtown Area.*

cycle trails) should be developed to provide amenity and a location for city celebrations and special events. The Midtown Area is ideally suited for these types of places and activities, due to its central location within the city. The “threads” for a cohesive open space system exist—with future trails planned along the creeks, utility and railroad rights-of-way, and along Elm Alley adjacent to Fire Station Number 1.

#### **Goal 4: Improve the character of streets within the area.**

In an urban setting, streets constitute a valuable open space resource; however, they are typically designed for the single purpose of accommodating automobile movement. In Midtown Milpitas, streets can be enhanced with landscaping and amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists, and viewed as an important component of the overall open space system.

#### **Development Pattern**

*Policy 5.1: Establish a development pattern along Main Street and around the transit stations that is oriented to pedestrians and consistent with the Design Standards and Guidelines. More specifically, buildings should address streets, pedestrian paths, parks and open spaces, and transit stations with entries, windows, bays, balconies, and other articulated features. Parking lots should not dominate the experience along any prominent street or pedestrian route.*

The current development pattern in the Midtown Area is “anti-pedestrian” with development that turns away from the street, places blank walls and fences along the street, and locates large parking areas adjacent to the sidewalk. One of the primary community design considerations for Midtown Milpitas revolves around creating a development pattern that reinforces pedestrian movement. The guidelines contained in this Specific Plan call for an orientation of buildings on



*Sculpture and public art is encouraged in parks and private development, like Baylands Park in Sunnyvale, at left. Creek corridors can be developed as multi-purpose greenways, like Guadalupe River Park in San Jose, at right.*

the site in a way that reinforces pedestrian movement and the public realm of the city. It discourages developments that are internalized (with large, looped and gated circulation) and that “turn their back” on the streets and sidewalks, making them dead spaces. This arrangement of development discourages pedestrian movement and generally degrades the public realm.

Pedestrian routes should be developed as an interconnected system of sidewalks and pedestrian paths, as described in Policy 4.13. Pedestrian access should not be limited to vehicle access locations; separated pedestrian access points should be provided where ever possible. Sidewalks should be separated from driveways and well-lighted with pedestrian-scaled fixtures. Policies contained in the Circulation Element (4.16 and 4.17) provide for traffic calming improvements along Main Street (intersection bulb-outs,

special paving at crosswalks, on-street parking) which will slow traffic and make the area more attractive for pedestrian use.

***Policy 5.2: Design buildings to create an attractive streetwall which defines and activates the street space.***

The Specific Plan envisions transforming the major roadways in the Midtown Area into attractive boulevards that are comfortable for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit patrons as well as motorists. The strategy for these streets is two-fold: improve streetscape elements (landscaping, lighting, benches) and orient development to the street. Along Main Street, Great Mall Parkway, Main Street, Abel Street and Capitol Avenue, new development will be oriented and designed to create a streetwall which conveys a sense of enclosure to the street and interest at the pedestrian level.





*The Specific Plan provides for the improvement of streetscapes to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. On Main Street, a more traditional street is envisioned, like Castro Street in Mountain View, with a more defined streetwall, on-street parking, and cohesive planting, lighting and street furniture design.*

***Policy 5.3: Promote high-quality private development that contributes to the visual identity and environmental quality of the Midtown Area through the application of the Development Standards and Design Guidelines.***

The plan includes a separate Development Standards and Design Guidelines Chapter (Section 8.0) to provide direction to new development and more specific requirements that implement the policies of this plan. The plan ensures that new development (including new buildings, remodels and additions) is of high-quality, and reinforces the public realm which includes city streets, sidewalks, parks and pedestrian and bicycle paths. As it pertains to remodeling and minor expansions of existing buildings, the plan encourages the use of attractive, compatible facade improvements and the use of appropriate building materials.

## **Streetscape**

***Policy 5.4: Implement a program of streetscape improvements (sidewalks, landscaping, bike lanes, benches, lighting) along Main and Abel Streets and Great Mall Parkway.***

The plan recommends the enhancement of streets, including provisions for pedestrian circulation, bike circulation, street tree landscaping, pedestrian-scaled light fixtures, benches and other amenities. Emphasis should be placed on street tree planting on Great Mall Parkway and Abel Street, to create an attractive “green boulevard” with large specimen trees planted within medians, where possible, and along the curb edges of sidewalks. Along Main Street emphasis should be placed on developing a unified streetscape design, including street trees, benches, and pedestrian-scaled lighting, sidewalk paving and traffic calming features.

In general, streets through the Midtown Area are important civic arteries, and the primary street tree should be a large canopy species planted with sufficient spacing such that at maturity, a continuous tree canopy would be created. Smaller accent trees planted in clusters which exhibit seasonal interest should be used to mark intersections or important destinations. Recommendations for street tree species and spacing are summarized in Table 5-1. Below are recommendations for streetscape concepts for important streets in the Midtown Area.

*Main Street:* The overall idea for Main Street is to create a classic “American Main Street” environment with trees that create a canopy of green. Along Main Street between Weller Street and Curtis Avenue, an urban street tree planting with trees planted within wells with tree grates at the curb edges of sidewalks are recommended. For this street, Raywood Ash trees are recommended because of their open “lacy” habit which allows filtered sunlight and views through to ground-level signs. At intersections and entry points, accent trees (Jacmond Birch) are recommended to add visual interest and emphasize important locations. Decorative pedestrian-scale light fixtures (i.e., 12–16 feet) should be used (see Street Furniture Group A in the City of Milpitas’ Streetscape Master Plan).

*Abel Street:* Along Abel Street, a landscaped median and street tree planting can create a distinctive boulevard image on this important artery. London Plane Trees, a classic street tree species, are recommended for both the street and

median tree plantings, which should be formal geometric planting. Along the Penetencia Creek Trail, more naturalistic planting patterns and native riparian trees are recommended (California Sycamore and Fremont Cottonwood) to create a unique character for this street. Street trees should be planted at the curb edge in a planting strip to provide amenity for pedestrians and bicyclists.

*Great Mall Parkway:* Great Mall Parkway is also a broad boulevard which should be planted with large trees along the sidewalks and in the median to create an attractive entry image for the city. A unique feature of this street is the LRT alignment which will be elevated and within the median through Midtown. Along the curb edges, large round-headed trees, (Chinese Pistache, another classic street tree species) are recommended within a curbside planting strip. Flowering accent trees (Eastern Redbud, Forest Pansy) should be planted at intersections and near the LRT stations. In addition, palm trees are recommended at the LRT and future BART station to provide a distinctive image for these important civic destinations.

*Curtis Avenue, Corning Avenue, Serra Way and Carlo Street:* The smaller streets which connect Main and Abel Streets are recommended to be improved with street trees planted in planter strips at the curb with London Plan and Scarlett Maple Trees. This would make these smaller streets visually connected with Abel Street and further emphasize the unique character of Main Street.

**TABLE 5.1**  
Midtown Street Tree Recommendations

Street	Proposed Tree	Typical Spacing (feet)	Alternate Tree/Spacing	Typical Spacing (feet)
<b>Main Street</b>				
Primary	Angustifolia, Raywood Ash	20 to 25 o.c.		
Accent	Jacomond Birch Betula jacquemonti	15 to 20 o.c.		
<b>Abel Street</b>				
Primary	Platanus acerifolia “Yarwood” London Plane Tree	25 to 30 o.c.	Ulmus parvifolia “Drake” Chinese Elm	15 to 20 o.c.
Median	Platanus acerifolia “Yarwood” London Plane Tree	25 to 30 o.c.	Ulmus parvifolia “Drake” Chinese Elm	15 to 20 o.c.
Accent	<u>Color:</u> Cercis canadensis Eastern Redbud, Forest Pansy Creek/Trail: Platanus racemosa California Sycamore Populus fremontii (male) Fremont Cottonwood	10 to 15 o.c.  30 to 35 o.c.  30 to 35 o.c.		10 to 15 o.c.
<b>Great Mall Parkway</b>				
Primary	Chinensis Chinese Pistache	15 to 20 o.c.	Platanus acerifolia “Yarwood” London Plane Tree	25 to 30 o.c.
Accent	Cercis canadensis Forest Pansy Eastern Redbud Washingtonia robusta Mexican Fan Palm	10 to 15 o.c.  20 to 25 o.c.	Washingtonia filifera California Fan Palm	10 to 15 o.c.
<b>Curtis Avenue, Corning, Serra Way, Carlo Street</b>				
Primary	Platanus acerifolia “Yarwood” London Plane Tree	25 to 30 o.c.	Ulmus parvifolia “Drake” Chinese Elm	15 to 20 o.c.
Accent	<u>Color:</u> Acer Rubrum Scarlett Maple	15 to 20 o.c.	Color: Cercis canadensis Eastern Redbud	10 to 15 o.c.

**Policy 5.5: Place street tree landscaping at the curb edges of sidewalks to improve the environment for pedestrians.**

In order to improve the visual appearance and amenity of streets for pedestrians and bicyclists, street tree landscaping should be placed at the curb edges of sidewalks in planter strips or within wells (see Table 5-1 for recommendations). Along very wide boulevards where there is no on-street parking, such as Great Mall Parkway or Abel Street, a planter strip with trees and lower shrub planting, mounded to create an edge between pedestrian and vehicular traffic is encouraged. Along Main Street, where there is a closer relationship between on-street parked cars, sidewalks and shopfronts, a traditional urban street tree treatment with trees planted within wells with decorative grates, is recommended.

## Community Gateways

**Policy 5.6: Enhance the entry identity at designated gateway zones (see Figure 5.1) with special landscape treatment, monuments and/or architectural features.**

At main entrances to the city and at transit stations, special landscape and/or architectural features should be implemented to define and differentiate Milpitas from adjoining development in San Jose. The general recommendations for gateway treatment in Midtown are described below.

*South Main Street and Capitol Avenue at the City Limits:* The plan recommends streetscape improvements, particularly unified street tree planting and lighting to enhance the sense of entry to the community. Entry features, such as low walls, pavillions, city signage announcing “Milpitas,”

and a grouping of seasonal trees, could further enhance the entry image. The guidelines encourage new development to incorporate architectural features that express a sense of entry, such as tower elements or special corner treatment.

*Calaveras Boulevard:* Streetscape improvements intended to improve the entry image of Calaveras Boulevard are contained in the City of Milpitas’ Streetscape Master Plan. New office development at Serra Way and Calaveras Boulevard should incorporate special landscape (e.g., small plaza, open space, trees) and architectural treatment (e.g., tower elements) to convey a sense of entry.

*Great Mall Parkway and Main Street:* This area should be enhanced through streetscape planting and architectural features. A special median landscape treatment should be implemented at Main and Abel Streets and Great Mall Parkway. The streetscape design should reference landscape elements from the transit station design to create a cohesive appearance to the area. Distinctive architectural features (i.e., corner towers) should be incorporated into new residential development on the Abel property.

## Landmarks and Public Art

**Policy 5.7: Encourage the rehabilitation and adaptive re-use of designated buildings or features.**

The preservation of historic resources should be encouraged where ever possible. The following resources are existing buildings or landscape features in the Midtown Area identified in the City of Milpitas’ Register of Cultural Resources;





Figure 5.I: Community Gateways



*London Plane trees create a cathedral of green on The Alameda in San Jose.*

the City of Milpitas' Historic Sites Survey; or by the Santa Clara County Historical Heritage Commission. These resources are as follows:

*Milpitas Grammar School/Senior Center, 160 North Main Street:* This building was completed in 1916 and is an outstanding example of a neo-classical public building. This structure is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

*DeVries/Smith Home, 163 North Main Street:* This building was completed in 1915 and is a locally rare example of a prairie-style building. It was home to Dr. Renselaer J. Smith, the second doctor to set up practice in Milpitas. This structure served as both Dr. Smith's residence and medical office.

*Winsor Blacksmith Shop, 112 North Main Street:* This building was completed in the 1920s and is a locally rare surviving early false-front commercial building. The Winsor family settled in Milpitas in 1863. The blacksmith shop was built by brothers Tom and George Winsor.

*St. John's Church Site and Chapel, 279 South Main Street:* This is the site of the oldest church in Milpitas, originally constructed in 1870. The oldest remaining resources on this site include a small Mission-style chapel (circa 1910) and two large palm trees that were planted in 1901.

*Cambell's Corners (a.k.a. Smith's Corners), 167 South Main Street:* Cambell's Corner is a historic structure located at the historic crossroads of the Milpitas-Alviso Road (Calaveras Boulevard) and the San Jose-Oakland Road (now Main Street).

This corner has been the site of a saloon since Milpitas was first established as a community in the mid-1800s.

*Caudillo House, 280 South Main Street:* The Caudillo House, built in 1899, is a locally rare example of a Queen Anne-style building.

*Elm Alley, South Main Street:* These elm trees once lined the entrance to a large mansion. Although the mansion is now gone, the row of trees still exist and are considered locally significant. Although these trees have resisted the destructive Dutch Elm Disease, they have become diseased through improper pruning. The trees cross both the City and County properties. The City is attempting to work with the County to prepare and implement a tree management plan.

***Policy 5.8: Consider financial incentives, such as waiving City development fees and establishing a historical building preservation fund, to assist property owners who wish to pursue an historically-accurate restoration of their building. Ensure that building restorations receiving City support meet standards of architectural integrity.***

The City may consider providing financial incentives to property owners through mechanisms such as waiving fees, or establishing a historical building preservation fund to assist the building owners with the extraordinary costs of renovating older buildings. To receive City support, plans should be developed by a licensed architect specializing in historic buildings.

***Policy 5.9: Consolidate the Milpitas Historical Commercial District into the Midtown Specific Plan; replace the architectural design guidelines with the design guidelines included within this plan.***

The Milpitas Historical Commercial District was designated in 1975 along with the City's Architectural Guidelines and Standards specifying an "Early California" theme. The district boundaries are: the Union Pacific Railroad (former Southern Pacific Railroad) rail lines on the east; Weller Street on the north; Abel Street on the west; and the Hetch Hetchy right-of-way on the south. This district includes several City-designated cultural resources and these resources are recognized by this Specific Plan. The architectural guidelines, however, designate a theme of "Early California" for Main Street. This theme is inappropriate for Main Street, which developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and not in the pre-1850 period that the theme is referencing. Rather than attempting to falsely re-create historic buildings, new development along Main Street should incorporate forms and patterns that are sympathetic to the true architectural traditions of the street, namely late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial architecture. The Specific Plan includes guidelines which would achieve this intent.

*Policy 5.10: Integrate public art, including sculpture, mosaics, murals, and decorative water features into new office, civic, public/institutional, and public spaces in the Midtown Area.*

Public art is an important element that can provide a sense of identity and a focus of interest within the urban environment. Public art should generally be placed in areas that are publicly accessible such as parks, building exteriors, greenways, civic or community buildings. Public art programs will be under the purview of the City's Arts Commission.

*Policy 5.11: Consider adoption of a "Percent for Arts" or similar financial incentives to support art in public places.*

"Percent for Arts" is a fee program that requires new development to provide public art or an in-lieu fee equivalent to 1 percent of the value of the project. This is a program that should be considered for the Midtown Area.